

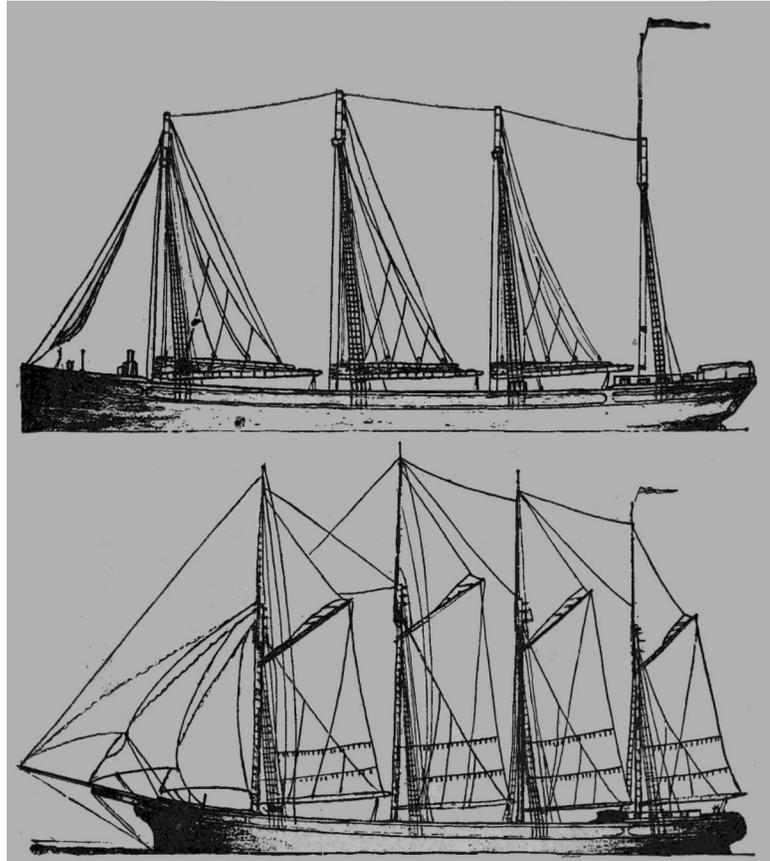
Toronto Telegram, November 26, 1949
Schooner Days CMXXVII (927)
By C. H. J. Snider

END OF THE “WATER of the RAPIDS”

The *Minnedosa*, largest lake schooner built in Canada, was a successful vessel, but she did not seem able to carry loads big enough to pay for the high cost of operating her after the topmasts were taken out, and she was always in tow. Perhaps the low rates from the lake head and the fact that she had to tow up light, that is, without cargo and consequently earning nothing, was the explanation, but “the office” looked grimly at the amount of space in the hold always empty. Capt. Phillips, who had succeeded to the command, took the hint, and resolved to break all carrying records with her if he had to lighten her from

Port Colborne to Port Dalhousie. So he put into her at Fort William the most wheat, it was said, she had ever tried to carry. There was still room under the hatches. She had still plenty of freeboard, it was tough, although there was no plimsoll mark on the Lakes.

A 75,000 bushel figure was reported in The Telegram of Oct, 25, 1905. That much wheat was 2,250 tons dead weight, the combined carrying capacity of three of the 140 ft. “Old Canal” size schooners. The *Minnedosa*, as said, was 225 feet long, and capable of carrying so much, on her dimensions. She had not done so before because the depth of water in the Welland Canal did not accommodate the draught required, and so large a load might have to be lightered to get through. Her name, by the way, meant “Water of the Rapids” or “Swiftwater.”



Two boyhood studies of the "MINNEDOSA" off Port Dalhousie and in the Welland Canal, in 1905, by Rowley W. Murphy, O.S.A., present instructor in the Ontario College of Art. One is from the Henderson portrait of 1890. The other shows her stripped of her tophammer and shortened by removing her figurehead.

CAUGHT

They had bad weather coming down Lake Huron, with the big red-hulled barge *Melrose*, also built in 1895, towing astern of the *Minnedosa*. Very bad. This was on the 25th of October, 1905. It was night, and black as the *Minnedosa*'s sides when she was fresh painted. The sea was running so high between steamer and tow that they frequently lost sight of each other's lights. Two and a half miles out of the Harbor Beach, that magnificent harbor of refuge which Lake Huron owes to Abraham Lincoln, the *Westmount* began to shorten in on the towline, to make the turn in. There was special gear for this, for the *Minnedosa*, the steel towing hawser being controlled by a steam winch.

The second engineer carefully watched the gauge which showed the amount of pressure and tension. With a good breeze the *Minnedosa* would, with sail set, walk right up on the towing steamer, with her towline hanging slack in a bight, and sometimes she would pass her, and have to cast off her line, to avoid turning the steamer around and towing her stern first.

In a storm the vessels being towed never made sail without orders and exchange of whistle signals.

"My God, chief!" said the Second to the First, "Has that man cast off on a night like this and gone on his own? There's nothing but slack in that line, for there's next to no pressure on the gauge!"

"Keep on," said the chief, "you'll see pressure enough once she begins to jump in this sea."

Three bells from the wheelhouse – "Slow!" The winch-gauge jumped to "Avast heaving." The pressure indicator stood at nil.

Short barks from the whistle, followed by long wails – unanswered. That was the *Minnedosa*'s requiem.

SUNK

The towing wire came up out of the water, in the wavering light of the stern lantern, with a great pair of heavy oak knightheads and towing-bitts attached, with fragments of oak plank, broken and bristling with spikes, and strings of oakum like rags of human hair.

That was all. She had gone down in deep water, no one ever knew why, when or where. The unyielding and remorseless hawser had plucked her bitts out by the roots.

The lights of the *Melrose*, the second barge, were sighted. The *Westmount* stood by her till daylight. It was too dark and the sea was running too high to attempt to give her a line earlier. Aboard the *Melrose* they thought they heard a cry after midnight, "For God's sake, cut that line," and had cast off their own towline. The lights of the *Minnedosa* vanished. The *Westmount* searched for hours for survivors before putting into Harbor Beach and only reached its shelter at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

With the *Minnedosa* were lost Capt. John Phillips of Kingston and his wife, and a crew of seven. There were two Prince Edward Island sailor brothers in her, Arthur, the mate, and Jack, before the mast. They belonged to Charlottetown, but had been sailing out of Kingston all season, but no one seemed to know their last names. The others in the crew were James Allen, a saltwater sailor, George Smith and Wm. McIntyre, all hailing from Kingston.